CENSORSHIP AS IT AFFECTS THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

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Censorship, as a problem, in the school library is increasing rather than decreasing. Attacks on the schools, which usually include criticism of materials, have increased in number during the last few years. The cases at Pasadena, California; Denver, Colorado; Englewood, New Jersey; Ferndale, Michigan; Tenafly, New Jersey; Scarsdale, New York; Port Washington, New York and many others have had national publicity. There may be many more.

Although these attacks on the schools were in widely separated areas, there was a curious similarity in the criticism and method of attack. Richard B. Kennan, Secretary of the National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education, of the National Education Association, sent 15,239 questionnaires to superintendents, advisory members and local association presidents concerning "unjustified attacks" on local schools. By "unjustified attacks" they meant movements which appeared to have as their purpose "nothing less than the emasculation or destruction of the American system of free public education."[1]

The results of the survey showed that although the majority of the attacks were local in origin, certain national organizations appeared to play either a direct or indirect part in the initiation or promotion of others. The attacks, encouraged by these groups, seemed to try to create distrust of the school system, school teachers and officials.[2]

Dr. Hubert C. Armostrong, director of the Public Education Association, gives three major sources of complaints against school materials: (1) Ultra or super-patriots who often criticize books that they haven't read; (2) organized minorities, usually racial or religious, who feel that certain passages in texts are prejudicial toward their interests; and (3) full-time professional complainers, such as Allen Zoll and Lucile Cardin Crain, with enough financial support to make their influence nation wide.[2]

Among the organizations currently attacking the schools, Robert A. Skaife, Field Secretary, National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education, lists these: American Education Association, American Parents Committee on Education, Church League of America, Conference of Small Business Organizations, Employers Association of Chicago, Institute for Public Service, Friends of Public Schools of America, Guardians of American Education, and the National Association of Pro-America.

Which materials and authors are criticized? It is impossible to include here a complete listing but some examples can be given. The controversy over the Rugg social studies books and the Building America Series is well known, but not many are aware that in Pasadena there was opposition to Modern American Poetry and Modern British Poetry edited by Louis Untermeyer and to Probing our Prejudices by Hortense Powdermaker.

Some of the people who are considered "leftist" and whose writings are unapproved by the Educational Review are Henry Wallace, Harry Hopkins, Joseph Gollomb, and Joseph Gaer. The Friends of the Public Schools of America Bulletin lists many more people. Some of them are: James T. Adams, Carleton Beals, William A. Alexander, Charles A. Beard, Pearl Buck, Granville Hicks, Owen Lattimore, David Lilienthal, Lin Yutang, Carl Sandburg, Sigmund Spaeth, Mark Van Dorn, Archibald MacLeish, and Walt Whitman.

Some of the secondary school texts which are disapproved by the Educational Review are Atwood, The World at Work; Casner, The Story of American Democracy; Kelty, The Beginnings of the American People and Nation; and White, Making Our Government Efficient, which is published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and National Council for the Social Studies. The Friends of the Public Schools disapproved of such books as Education and the Promise of America by G. S. Counts; Bent Twig, by D. C. Fisher; Paton, Cry the Beloved Country; Americans All by G. Selden. The criticism of Magruder's American Government was given wide publicity by Fulton Lewis, Jr. when he was discussing un-American propaganda in school books. Following this the book was banned in many places. Later when people had had time to read the book they reversed their decision. The Texas State Text Book Committee adopted the book for five years and Georgia's unfavorable decision was reversed.

> "Textbook censorship is poisoning America's free spirit," warned Dr. Luther H. Evans, [former] Librarian of Congress. "The experts in vituperation, the sadists of freedom, are abroad in the land, and are having a heyday. We must learn not to fear them. We must show them up for what they are. They are cowards who are unwilling to live the American Dream."[3]

What is the librarian's responsibility? Sara Krentzman Srygley in an article says:

> "The library's chief function, to encourage free access to information and the skill to use it intelligently, is at stake.

"In my opinion, every school librarian worthy of the title will assume responsibility for helping to combat these attacks. At least three ways appear to be pertinent: (1) He can become informed concerning these attacks, the persons leading them and their techniques; (2) He can clarify his own thinking as to what he believes the library's policy should be concerning censorship, book banning, the teaching of controversial issues; (3) He can try to encourage the group with which he works to cooperate in clarifying and stating the school's position concerning such policies, before a problem situation arises.

. . . . . .

"Every librarian should be familiar with "The Public School and the American Heritage," the policy statement of the NEA's National Commission to Defend Democracy Through Education. It has been approved by many organizations, including the American Library Association and the American Textbook Publishers Institute. It clearly states that "Teachers and administrators must encourage young people to locate, use, and evaluate relevant materials of instruction as they identify and analyze significant contemporary problems and form judgments about them. However, they must not direct or compel any particular judgments."[4]

This same point of view is presented by David K. Berninghausen:

"There is no question about the right and responsibility of teachers and librarians to select, as wisely as possible, reading material for use in the schools. But as Laura K. Martin, an authority on magazine use in high schools, says:

"Extreme expression of opinions (and the reactionary periodicals are also worthy of examination as specimens) are part of the living fabric of social studies materials to be weighed and analyzed more minutely in the classroom than they can be in the library. For the most violent of agitators, from soapbox or from printed page, says some true things and the recognition of half-truths, which are the common coin of the hypocrite of any political stripe, should be part of the beginning experience of any high school student."

Berninghausen then goes on to say:

"Someone must select library materials, but selection must be carefully balanced to include various points of view on any controversial subject. Exclusion of literature because it "attacks the faith of some pupils," or because it describes the unsolved problems of the United States, or because of any unorthodox position cannot be defended.' Such exclusion will inevitably lead to a coercive

uniformity of opinion and a static view of the universe that will weaken our chance of survival.

"America has been able to adjust to the modern world because new ideas have been permitted under our concept of free inquiry. The approach to a new idea, and also to an old idea up for reconsideration, should be to appraise it, approve, modify, or reject it as a guide to action - never to ban it. Teachers, librarians, authors, publishers, and the public must unite to prevent the burning of books. For the burning of books forecasts the decline of the nation."[5]

The Librarian of the Idaho State College Library says in his article, "Congress as Censor," that there were about ten resolutions and bills presented that were concerned with censorship and one of them provided that the "Librarian of Congress shall mark all subversive matter in the Library of Congress and compile a list thereof for the guidance of other libraries in the United States." These bills did not pass. Mr. Oboler then says:

"The representatives of the people have spoken; what is the responsibility of American Librarians? The librarian's responsibility does not end with accepting what censors condescend to permit him to keep and make available in his library. The librarian as citizen must get out of his ivory tower and use the techniques of public relations, which his profession has taught him, to fight the enemy at the gates. Mere talk, even on the level of the recent ALA Conference on Intellectual Freedom, is not sufficient.

"There must be persuasive activity to acquaint all those engaged in communicating ideas - the educators, the journalists, the radio-film-TV people, the lecturers - with the real and urgent nature of the dire threat to freedom of speech which a censorship-minded Congress presents. It is fully as important to let legislators know the stand on the question of censorship as it is to inform them of the position on taxation, controls, or any of the more highly publicized national issues.

"Talk to the local civic groups; alert the local editors; start a "grass-roots" campaign which will effectively convince Congress that censorship is not what American wants.[6]

Kimball Wiles, in an article says:

"All citizens must deal with controversial issues day by day in meeting the problems of the community and nation. Ability to think through these issues and to take action in terms of the decisions reached is an essential skill in our democratic society. No school adequately trains for American citizenship unless it helps its students develop skill in dealing with controversial issues.

"Such skill cannot be developed unless students have experience in studying the issues. Skill comes with practice. Since only about fifty per cent of our youth finish high school, study of controversial issues is essential citizenship training at least as low as the junior high school. ...

"The teaching of controversial issues cannot be successful unless students have access to sources which present points of view."[7]

But we have some people with a different point of view. They feel that we should carefully choose the material which is presented to children. This point of view is expressed by Gladys Schmitt:

"What standards, we ask ourselves, shall we use in selecting those books which we hand on to the immature. We would be naive and childish to start with the premise that every work of art, simply because it is a work of art, is of necessity an uplifting and enriching experience to the reader.

"We have been very careful to exercise our function of guidance in the area of the obscene. We have exercised it not at all in the area of the neurotic... Nor have we always been as mindful as we ought to have been of the need for examining the social, political, and ethical concepts inherent in those works of literature which we give, with our blessing, to the young.

"In the field of social studies we have a relatively clear understanding of the sort of thinking that we want young people to do concerning social questions. In the field of literature, when we are dealing with people who have very few standards of literary judgment, it seems to me that our sole aim should be to develop those standards, to raise the temper of literary sensibility. And I am convinced too, that the less this task of forming literary standards is complicated by the inclusion of materials based on ideas that may very possibly run counter to the things which we are teaching in the social studies, the better off all of us will be.

> "Let me reiterate that we are not speaking of a general censorship.... When the student has passed his 18th year, we are willing, with Milton, to "let man's reason be his own chooser." Nor can we, even in our function of guidance, set down any hard and fast rule that will cover all cases. The only solution is good sense, good intentions, and good judgment applied to each individual case."[8]

But do children suddenly gain reason on their 18th birthday or do they develop through experience just as they learn to walk by experience - first standing unsteadily, trying and tottering and even falling until through experience they develop the ability to walk?

There are those people who would have librarians label publications which advocate or favor communism or which are issued by communist organizations or any organization formally designated by any authorized government official or agency as communistic or subversive; furthermore, such publication should not be freely available in libraries to readers or in schools to pupils but should be obtainable only by signing suitable applications.

Then there are some people who think that librarians are censoring books when they select them but Lester Asheim clearly defines the difference:

> "Selection, then, begins with a presumption in favor of liberty of thought; censorship, with a presumption in favor of thought control. Selection's approach to the book is positive, seeking its values in the book as a book, and in the book as a whole. Censorship's approach is negative, seeking for vulnerable characteristics wherever they can be found - anywhere within the book, or even outside it. Censorship seeks to protect -- not the right -- but the reader himself from the fancied effects of his reading. The selector has faith in the intelligence of the reader, the censor has faith only in his own."[9]

Keeping pupils from seeing certain materials is a propaganda device to load the dice in favor of the conclusion the teachers or persons collecting the material want the pupils to accept. If youth are to learn how to deal with controversial issues, they must gain skill in analyzing information to determine the facts, the source of the materials and the slant given.

Some librarians ask why should they stand out against public demands? After all, the schools and libraries belong to the public. Yes, they are the public's schools and libraries but they belong to all the public not to small pressure groups. The librarian has excellent authority for a stand against censorship. There are several basic policy statements for them to follow such as, The Library Bill of Rights, The Public School and the American Heritage, President Eisenhower's Letter to the ALA, and The ALA Freedom to Read. These are helpful statements but they are most effective if the

librarian uses them before trouble arises. Dr. Cornelius Greenway in an address before the American Library Association Conference said:

> "When you librarians and staffs feel the heavy hand of censorious guardians, remember you belong to a very powerful organization -- The American Library Association -- an organization that has no less than 5,000 delegates attending this 71st Annual Convention. You are not standing alone in the battle of a free press and a free library. Don't fear the self-styled and self-appointed guardians of the public welfare who seek to prohibit the circulation or even the acquisition of what to them is subversive or sacriligious." When our libraries lose their freedom, then all is lost."[10]

Each school system should set up a policy for selecting materials which should include endorsement of The Public Schools and the American Heritage statement as well as the American Association of School Librarians School Library Bill of Rights Statement reprinted at the end of this article. This should be done, if possible, before trouble arises for clear thinking is not possible in an atmosphere of tension.

The school library itself is a safeguard against biased teaching. Children who have access to many points of view will not easily accept the idea that any one person or book is the final authority. Then too, no one can detect biased teaching as quickly as the librarian. She knows the teacher's point of view by the kinds of materials for which the children ask and she can easily point out other materials.

But the real solution is in the teaching process itself. Children should be taught not to accept any book as the final authority but to ask such questions as: who wrote this? when was it written? why does the author think this? what does someone else think? what do I think now? will there be future developments which may change the picture?

The amount of change in what is accepted as the final truth is well illustrated by the following statement :

> "Alfred North Whitehead remarked, when he was eighty years old, that during his lifetime almost every physical law that he had learned at school had been superseded or revised. How many millions of pupils must have struggled to "learn" these partial truths! Is it a wise--or even safe--course to insist that our children be taught the same 'truths' we learned a century ago.

"The social studies are still younger and more complex. Most of our controversial literature is in this area. The methods and techniques of the social sciences are not established and the possibilities for error are relatively large. Does this mean that we should forbid the teaching of social science? Does it mean that the only orthodox ideas regarding social problems shall be permitted in a school library?

"In order to handle the problem of controversial reading, we must recognize the distinction between imparting information and helping pupils learn to read and think for themselves. Education for democratic living in the twentieth century must emphasize the latter. With such emphasis the apparent need to ban books should rapidly disappear."[11]

This sort of teaching should not be limited to the upper levels of education. Even the youngest child can learn to compare information in books with his real experience. Remember all the stories and books about the milk horse which are read by primary children? Yet in many parts of the country there are no milk horses, they have become obsolete. This one situation can provide material for several discussions. This experience will help children see that material in books is not good for all time and all place.

There are numerous cowboy stories that tell about the cowboys sitting around the fire, strumming guitars and singing. One book even says that they do this because they do not have any other amusements. But any child who has been in a ranch country knows that the cowboys have portable radios, television, and that they can easily get to the movies on Saturday nights. Here again children can learn that times change and they have to look for new facts.

Children who have experience with problem solving techniques soon learn to think for themselves and to give reasons for their decisions. They also learn to recognize propaganda. One such group (fifth grade) when asked to evaluate three films about ranching and the meat industry said, "That one has too much propaganda in it. It was made during the war when they didn't want us to eat meat."

It is not only librarians and educators who think that children should have access to a wide variety of material. The largest meeting ever held by the American Association for the Advancement of Science ended with a plea that the nation's children be taught how to find things out for themselves.

"It is high time to realize that both our most recent and destructive world wars have started in kindergarten and elementary schools, mainly in those of Germany, where children from the first beginning were 'taught' to blindly obey the orders of their superiors. Self-expression, with few exceptions was suppressed. Only in such an atmosphere of total "discipline" and "obedience" could a people blindly follow the leader.

"Only when children from the early beginning are taught to follow patterns will they accept such patterns elsewhere. The very nature of a totalitarian state must be built on the glorification of the 'pattern' as opposed to the very essence of the democratic ideas, that of 'finding things out for one's self'." [12]

Time and new facts throw new light on problems so we must give children free access to materials in order that they may learn to recognize and evaluate propaganda. Frank Buchanan, a former congressman says:

"It seems to me that teachers and schools have a tremendous responsibility not only to recognize themselves the structure and purpose of this kind of pressure group propaganda, but also to point it out to their students, who are, after all, the citizens of tomorrow.

"How can this be done? It is redundant to say that the schools should teach students how to think, but this is the basic answer. More specifically, the schools should provide students with tools to analyze the group ideologies which compete for their attention. I think it would be of tremendous value, for example, if every student at some time during his education were made familiar with the seven propaganda devices outlined by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis a few years ago. These devices are perhaps themselves somewhat oversimplified tools, but they are honest and, what is more, they are dramatic. Such tools of analysis are urgently needed to make real and vivid to the student the purposes and technics of the struggle for his opinion.

"In approaches of this kind, schools could make a tremendous contribution to the kind of informed public thinking so essential in a democracy." [13]

The one essential for this kind of teaching is library experience for all children from kindergarten on up. If children are provided with a wide variety of materials and then taught the skills of evaluation the public need not worry about banning books. As they grow to adulthood it will produce a public that will not be aroused by the book banning enthusiasts.

This may seem like not much help for present difficulties but it is the basic answer to the problem. In the meantime, librarians need to work on helping the present public see that it is not the content alone that is important but the way that it is used. It is helpful to have lay members on library and school committees. When lay groups sit down and really analyze the problem they come out with some fine standards.

TWO BASIC DOCUMENTS

I. The Report of the Committee on Book Selection in Defense of Liberty in Schools of a Democracy, June 22, 1954.

In general, we think:

1. There is a definite need of a statement.

2. The statement should be general; a specific one is not adequate. Leeway is needed for local interpretation.

3. A positive statement is preferable; what to provide; not what to guard against.

4. Any statement should have the endorsement of the N.E.A. and its related associations for effectiveness.

Specifically, we recommend that:

1. The A.A.S.L. endorse the A.L.A. Bill of Rights, supplementing it with a statement of our responsibilities.

II. School Library Bill of Rights

Endorsed by the Council of the American Library Association, July, 1955

School libraries are concerned with generating understanding of American freedoms and with the preservation of these freedoms through the development of informed and responsible citizens. To this end the American Association of School Librarians reaffirms the Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association and asserts that the responsibility of the school library is:

To provide materials that will enrich and support the curriculum, taking into consideration the varied interests, abilities, and maturity levels of the pupils served.

To provide materials that will stimulate growth in factual knowledge, literary appreciation, aesthetic values, and ethical standards.

To provide a background of information which will enable pupils to make intelligent judgments in their daily life.

To provide materials on opposing sides of controversial issues so that young citizens may develop under guidance the practice of critical reading and thinking.

To provide materials representative of the many religious, ethnic, and cultural groups and their contributions to our American heritage.

To place principal above personal opinion and reason above prejudice in the selection of materials of the highest quality in order to assure a comprehensive collection appropriate for the users of the library.

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